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My Inheritance of Sannyasa

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



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My Inheritance of Sannyasa



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My Inheritance of Sannyasa

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses from the Yogadrishti (Yogavision) series of satsangs
at Paduka Darshan Sannyasa Peeth, Munger,
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Dedication tip-on

Contents

Three Movements: Yoga, Seva, Sannyasa	1
From Yoga to Sannyasa: Looking Back, Looking Ahead	7
The Sannyasa Tradition	25
Eternal Teachings of the Parampara	42

Three Movements: Yoga, Seva, Sannyasa

11 July 2011

Our guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, had many inspirations and each took the form of a movement. When he arrived in Bihar in 1956, the very land called out to him. Sri Swamiji recognized its spiritual potential, and in the course of time he established the first movement, that of yoga, with the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger. Propagation of yoga was the mandate of his guru, Swami Sivananda, and Sri Swamiji fulfilled this mandate by making yoga a universal subject. Under the banner of the International Yoga Fellowship, he dedicated himself to the propagation of yoga for twenty years, from 1963 to 1983.

In these twenty years, through hard work and personal effort, he made yoga a worldwide movement. The establishment of an institution was never Sri Swamiji's goal; instead, he established a movement that would sustain itself for a long time.

In 1983, Sri Swamiji had another revelation which led him away from Munger and the Bihar School of Yoga without ever looking back. He had an indication that a new chapter of his life was to be written, and that the previous chapter had come to its conclusion. Following this revelation, he left everything he had created in Munger and went to Rikhia. The next revelation took shape in Rikhia and has become the second movement today with the establishment of Rikhiapeth, founded on Swami Sivananda's teachings of

serve, love and give. The purpose of Rikhiapeeth is to help the deprived sections of society find honour and respect in their lives, and to provide some of the basic comforts we all take for granted.

Sri Swamiji inspired and guided the activities of Rikhiapeeth until the year 2009, and when he knew that his participation in the establishment of Rikhiapeeth was over, he revealed the next vision.

The third vision revealed to me by Sri Swamiji was the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth. Sri Swamiji called me in 2009 and said, “You have worked and travelled throughout the country and the world, taking the message of yoga with you everywhere. Now you have to change your lifestyle. You have to change your personal life from yoga to sannyasa, as that is what you have received as inheritance from me.” He gave a detailed outline of how Sannyasa Peeth will develop over a period of twenty years. I am not creating anything new; I am only following the guru’s mandate, the blueprint that has been given by Sri Swamiji for the next twenty years. Do not ever think that Sannyasa Peeth is my creation; it is a continuation of the vision of Sri Swamiji. He has given detailed directions and guidelines on how Sannyasa Peeth will develop. It is a continuation of the mission and the vision that he has imparted.

Within these three institutions one can see three components of a bigger vision: the purpose of yoga is to still the mind, the purpose of seva is to connect with the heart, and the purpose of Sannyasa Peeth is to express creativity of the hands. Thus, head: yoga; heart: seva; hands: sannyasa; head, heart and hands. This is what is called Satyananda Yoga, an integration of head, heart and hands. These three components make Satyananda Yoga: personal practice, which is yoga; external participation in service, which is seva; and developing creativity to the maximum potential, which is sannyasa. This is how sannyasa has to be understood in the future.



A new definition of sannyasa

Many people believe that sannyasa is renouncing the world and adopting a spiritual mentality, attitude or belief. This is not sannyasa. Renunciation is not sannyasa. People can renounce their home, family and society without taking sannyasa. People can practise *tyaga*, renunciation, without adopting sannyasa. People can practise sadhana without adopting sannyasa. People can devote themselves to seva without adopting sannyasa. Whether it is sadhana, service, yoga, or any other method, these practices are merely mediums to enhance the nature and personality.

Sannyasa is a different thing. Sannyasa is not changing the clothes and wearing geru robes. Sannyasa is not having a spiritual name or shaving the head. Sannyasa is a lifestyle, a philosophy, a mentality and behaviour; sannyasa is sadhana.

Let us ask ourselves truthfully, what do we know of sannyasa? Have we ever subjected ourselves to the intensive sadhanas, attitudes and lifestyles of a sannyasin? There are

many aspects of sannyasa that sannyasins have not explored. Sannyasa was not the direction given by Sri Swamiji; none of us has ever received sannyasa training. He initiated us, certainly, but he gave us a different mandate: propagate yoga. Thus, in these robes, we started propagating yoga. Since having changed my lifestyle and involving myself more in understanding the different components of sannyasa, I am realizing we are far from sannyasa; we are like donkeys wearing the skin of a tiger. The nature, the character, the thinking is like that of a donkey, not of a tiger. Sannyasins today are ambitious and desire every kind of comfort and luxury for themselves. In order to live their own ambitions they say, “Oh, this is dedicated to my guru.”

Sannyasa is a very intensive lifestyle in which one has to work through yoga, through sadhana, through tapasya, through swadhyaya, and much more to become established in the identity of a sannyasin. Over the course of time, Sannyasa Peeth will clarify this understanding and knowledge. Today, sannyasins live their ambitions; they are not devoted or dedicated. They may think that what they are doing is an offering to their guru, but that is not the reality.

We are not even aware of what sannyasa is. We have taken diksha, yet none of us have advanced on the path of sannyasa. We are like apples hiding in the skin of an orange. When you peel the orange, you will find an apple, not an orange. The nature, the behaviour, the mentality has to change. For that, many connections must be made and many connections must be disconnected. A rewiring of the brain, mind, heart, hands, the whole life, has to take place. We cannot function with the old wiring, the old samskaras, the old mentality, and the old thoughts.

Inheritance of sannyasa

When Sri Swamiji said to me, “You are my successor,” I thought then that I was the successor of the kingdom of yoga that Sri Swamiji had established during his lifetime. This was a misunderstanding. After all, what is this kingdom? It

is an institution, and institutions are not run by individuals, but by the governing body. The members of this body keep changing. As a result, an institution is not my inheritance. What I have inherited from Sri Swamiji is sannyasa.

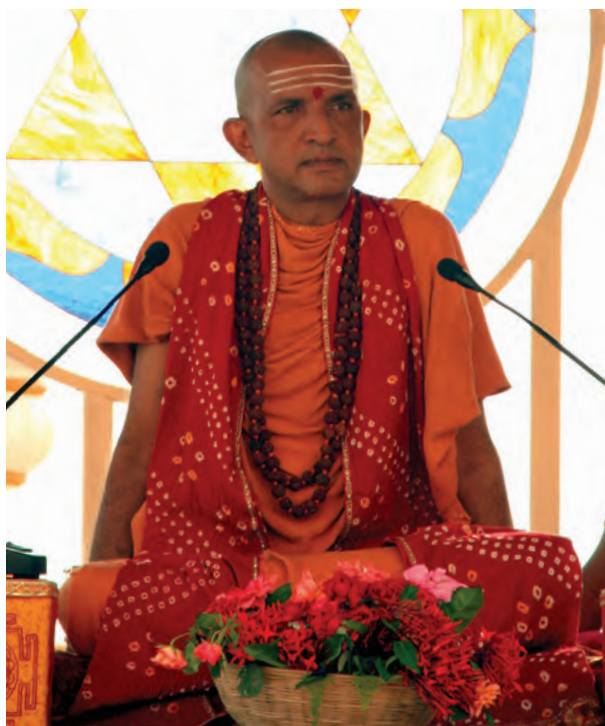
When I look at myself, I am reminded of Tulsidas' words: *Mo sama kauna kutila, khala, kaami* – “Who is as crafty, non-virtuous and passionate as me?” Many great saints have incarnated in India and we are nothing in front of them, nothing at all. Those who became great adopted certain ideals, behaviours and attitudes which gave inspiration to others and transformed their lives. People found joy, peace, prosperity and contentment, and most important of all, God's blessings.

Sri Swamiji has given me a huge responsibility. I am a learner, I am a sadhaka, and I cannot fathom how I can fulfil this responsibility to understand and experience sannyasa in my life. Nevertheless, my aspiration is to dedicate myself to tyaga, sannyasa and sadhana, and since I have started the journey of sannyasa, many small revelations have been taking place. I used to talk about meditation; today I know the experience and state of meditation. One year ago it was only theoretical; today it is practical, I have experienced it. I used to talk about samadhi; this year I have experienced samadhi. I used to talk about many things, and this year I am experiencing small glimpses of all those things.

Sannyasa is not a light affair for me; it is a very sacred thing, and I wish for everyone to understand this properly. Many people come to me and say, “Swamiji, can I take sannyasa?” I ask, “What will you do after taking sannyasa?” They reply, “I will go back home and live with my family.” I ask, “Then why do you want sannyasa?” They say, “It is because I have come to India, and maybe I won't get another chance to come here, so give me sannyasa now.” Sannyasa is not a commodity in the supermarket that you can just buy off the shelf. A proper understanding and awareness of what you need to do to progress on this path has to evolve.

When Sri Rama wanted to build a bridge across the sea to Lanka, stalwarts like Nala, Angad and Hanuman brought

huge rocks and put them in. One little squirrel wet itself with the sea water and then rolled in the sand. It shook off the wet sand in the gaps between the rocks and like mortar, this held the rocks together. The great bridge of sannyyasa has been made by the rishis, the gurus, saints and siddhas. What can our role be? We are not going to build a new bridge, but like the squirrel, we can contribute towards strengthening the bridge that has already been built. And perhaps one day, like the squirrel, our name will join the legion of the great Hanuman and Nala. This is the attempt and the effort. I have just started taking the first few steps. I might not be able to become like the gurus in our tradition, but like a little squirrel I can contribute to the building of the bridge. I look forward to your best wishes so I may be able to fulfil the faith my guru has placed in me and successfully accomplish his mandate.



From Yoga to Sannyasa

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

12 July 2011

Our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, was constantly inspired to fulfil the mandates given to him by his guru, Sri Swami Sivananda. Today we can see the results of his ceaseless effort in the three movements established: yoga in Munger, seva in Rikhia and now, with the development Sannyasa Peeth at Paduka Darshan, the continuation of our *parampara*, tradition, of sannyasa.

The three aspects of yoga, seva and sannyasa constitute what is known as Satyananda Yoga, or the Bihar Yoga tradition. Satyananda Yoga integrates the faculties of the head, heart and hands; through yoga, management of the head; through seva, opening of the heart. The third aspect, sannyasa, is for developing the inherent creativity in every individual. Sannyasa Peeth is an integral part of the Bihar Yoga tradition, the Satyananda Yoga tradition. This is a tradition that believes you should balance intellect, emotions and actions, so they complement each other and enhance your expression in life. Through yoga you can arrive at this balance.

The first mandate: yoga

Paduka Darshan, now the seat of Sannyasa Peeth, has a historical connection with Sri Swamiji since 1956, when the yoga movement was just beginning.

In the early days, when Sri Swamiji was wandering the Indian subcontinent, he came to Munger. Although he

had met many people in various places who had offered him support, resources and land to establish an ashram, he declined all offers, as the establishment of an ashram was not his purpose. He continued wandering. When he arrived in Bihar, the energy and the spiritual nature of the land attracted him. He came to Munger and discovered Paduka Darshan, previously known as Ananda Bhavan, where he then lived for many months each year, performing his higher sadhanas and passing the period of *chaturmas*, the four months of rainy season during which a sannyasin is supposed to stay in one place. In those days, Sri Swamiji still lived the life of a wandering ascetic, *parivrajaka*, and it was from here that he would periodically go away on his tours.

Sri Swamiji has a very deep connection with Bihar. It is the place where he initially performed his sadhanas and established himself in higher spiritual realizations. It was in Munger that many spiritual realizations were revealed to him. It was also in Munger that he had the vision of his guru, Sri Swami Sivananda, crossing the river Ganga on the day he had attained maha samadhi in Rishikesh. At that point, Sri Swamiji was sitting right here where I am sitting today. He says in his memoirs, “I was meditating and I knew my guru had left his body.” In meditation, while he was facing the Ganga, he had the vision of a boat crossing the river with his guru standing in the boat. At a certain moment, Swami Sivananda turned around and raised his arms in blessings. Sri Swamiji says he knew then that he had received the blessings and grace of his guru. From one of the flywheels of the boat, water splashed on Sri Swamiji’s face. When he opened his eyes, he found his body drenched in water. It is not possible for anybody to throw water this far from the Ganga; it would not have been an easy action. This was a vision Sri Swamiji had when he came to Munger. As a result, it was in Munger that he proclaimed that yoga will be the culture of tomorrow. He sensed that Munger would become the centre of a worldwide yoga movement, and this realization led him to establish a yoga ashram here in 1963.



Sri Swamiji established the Bihar School of Yoga to fulfil the mandate of his guru, "Propagate yoga from door to door and shore to shore." From 1963 to 1983, Sri Swamiji worked tirelessly to fulfil this mandate and take the message of yoga to every nook and corner of the world. For twenty years he made Munger his base. He made Munger known the world over as a centre of yoga, and presented yoga to the world as a science. He made yoga popular globally. The residents of Munger are witness to the ashram's growth and advancement, as well as its work in the propagation of yoga around the world.

Ganga Darshan is the seat of yoga as defined by Sri Swamiji for all time to come, and this cannot change. In this seat of yoga, you learn the techniques and methods and receive the ideas to improve the quality of your life and mind; personal effort and attempt is made to improve one's qualities. How much you succeed depends on your limitations. The systems are in place, the practices are available, the teachings have been given; you only have to understand and apply them, and then march forward. That is the purpose of yoga: to improve the quality of the mind and life and to open, purify

and cleanse the mind. This is what Sage Patanjali defined many thousands of years ago, yoga is a process of cleansing the mind (*Yoga Sutras* 1:2): *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah* – “To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga.”

What does it mean to manage the chitta vrittis? It means cleansing the mental dimension. It is cleaning the mind of its external associations which cause grief, strife, pain, suffering and disturbance, in order to find peace, happiness and contentment. Sage Patanjali said, “*Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*”, as it is through yoga that you can tame the chitta vrittis. He went on to give the world his eightfold path of yoga, a step by step process of cleansing the mind, of gaining mental peace and strengthening inner radiance. Even today, in the present environment, our need for yoga is to manage the mind; therefore, yoga is for the head. The centre for the knowledge of yoga is Munger, where the focus is on working with the mind, keeping the mind healthy.

It was never Sri Swamiji’s intention or thinking, however, to restrict his horizons to yoga. He used to say very clearly, “I am a sannyasin. What use do I have for an ashram? It is only a binding commitment, and I want to be free.” In order to honour his guru’s command, he dedicated his life to the propagation of yoga, and only when he was convinced that he had fully accomplished this goal did he leave Munger and begin to work toward the fulfilment of the next resolution.

The second mandate: seva

In 1983, when Sri Swamiji had fulfilled the first mandate of his guru, he had another revelation. In response to the call of that revelation, he left Munger and settled in Rikhia, which at that time was in Bihar. He began to perform higher sadhanas there. While doing this, he also inspired and guided the establishment, the vision and mission of Rikhiapeeth to propagate the three cardinal teachings of spiritual life and of Swami Sivananda: serve, love, give. His purpose was to uplift the community and more specifically, to help the deprived sections of society, to give them hope and a vision for their

life. Consequently, another movement was established in Rikhia, that of seva.

The saints and the wise have said that super intelligence means a glowing brain, and excellence in emotions means a glowing heart. When you strengthen the qualities of the heart, you become generous, simple, natural and spontaneous and work toward the upliftment of others. This aspect of yoga is experienced at Rikhia. At Rikhiapeeth, the focus is on seva or connection: connecting with people in need and helping them come out of their need to find security and happiness in life. The three cardinal teachings of Rikhiapeeth, serve, love and give, represent the aspect of opening the heart. When you love, you open your heart; when you serve, you open your heart; when you give, you open your heart. A heart connection takes place with people around you.

For twenty years, Sri Swamiji guided the activities at Rikhiapeeth just as he had guided the activities at Munger. Then came the time when he knew his involvement with Rikhia was complete. He gave the indication that he would be moving on. We thought he would move out of Rikhia, but little did we realize he would move to another dimension.

The third mandate: sannyasa

While the mandate of seva was being accomplished in Rikhia, I was looking after the yoga work, travelling across the country and overseas, going to different places, and propagating yoga. In 2008, I handed over responsibility of the administration of Bihar School of Yoga to the third generation, headed by Swami Suryaprakash, and withdrew to devote myself exclusively to the propagation of yoga. In July 2009, Sri Swamiji called and said, “I have had another revelation, another vision, one that I am handing over to you to fulfil. It is the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth. Stop the wanderings you have undertaken for the last forty years as a parivrajaka, moving from town to town, city to city, country to country, continent to continent, and settle in one place like a paramahansa sannyasin for some time. Perfect your own

sannyasa life and establish Sannyasa Peeth. That is my third mission which I am charging to you.” Then, in December 2009, he wilfully attained maha samadhi.

Establishment of Sannyasa Peeth

For one year following the maha samadhi of Sri Swamiji, I was engaged in the rituals and ceremonies that are performed in our tradition when a person of Sri Swamiji’s calibre attains maha samadhi. On the 6th of December, 2010, when the one year was complete, Sannyasa Peeth was officially established. On the very same day that we formalized the documents of Sannyasa Peeth, Sri Swamiji materialized physically at Guru Peeth in Ganga Darshan. His physical materialization was witnessed by the sannyasins there at the time. Some of us were in Rikhia, participating in the first day of Sat Chandi Mahayajna. While we were in Rikhia performing the celebrations and remembering Sri Swamiji, he materialized physically at Ganga Darshan. That gave me an indication that Sri Swamiji approved the effort, the work we are doing to propagate his teachings and that of the tradition.



Since Sri Swamiji appeared physically to indicate he is very much with us and continues to guide and inspire us, I decided that I should seriously consider, without wasting any time, my role in sannyasa and in Sannyasa Peeth. As a result, I undertook a sadhana which started on the 2nd of January, 2011: the worship of the Cosmic Mother, Durga, invoking her grace and blessings for the work that will be taking place in the coming years as per the sankalpas of Sri Swamiji. Sri Swamiji did not only say, “Establish Sannyasa Peeth,” but actually defined a twenty-year plan for me; how I need to live, act and behave in the next twenty years of my life. Following this mandate we started the Durga havan in order to seek divine grace and blessings, with the sankalpa of one full year. It culminates on 1st January, 2012.

During this period, I have been engaging myself in many different anushthanas and sadhanas, and am happy to say that I am beginning to get glimpses of the things that our ancestors, rishis, saints and the tradition have spoken about. Today, six months after beginning my sadhana, I have come to realize that sannyasa is not an easy path. None of us are sannyasins; none of you are sannyasins. You have been initiated and given a robe, a name and mantra, and you have shaved your head, but you don’t have the training, mentality or the inspiration of a sannyasin.

After you were initiated, you were given a mandate by your guru: go and teach yoga. That is your mandate. Teaching yoga is your mandate, given to you by your guru, Sri Swamiji. If you flirt with other things, you are breaking that mandate and you cannot call yourself a disciple. Remember that your guru has given you the mandate of yoga. Therefore, live yoga, propagate yoga, think yoga, dream yoga.

From yoga to sannyasa

Sri Swamiji released me from the mandate of yoga. He said, “Now you focus on sannyasa.” Since I have started doing this, many revelations have come; many experiences have come that are similar to the experiences of samadhi. Now, I have

had the experience of things that I would only speak about in the beginning. This is my personal journey. Before I can bring the teachings of sannyasa to other people, I have to live and realize what sannyasa is. Until and unless I have lived and realized what sannyasa is, I cannot teach other people the precepts of sannyasa. It is my journey that has started now and, in the course of time, other people will also join the train. Whether you do so or not is your choice, but if you decide to become a part of this train, this journey, then you must be willing to sacrifice many things.

Sannyasa is not shaving the head, wearing a robe, changing the name and saying, “Starting today, I have become different.” The ignorant can say that, as they don’t have the samskaras of sannyasins. I have seen many people who, in a wave of emotion, decide to take sannyasa. Afterwards they say, “Now that I have taken sannyasa, I am going back to my home and live with my family.” Many sannyasins live their own ambitions in the guise of offering everything to their guru. Where is the samskara of a sannyasin in that? Nobody has the samskara of a sannyasin. A true sannyasin knows that sannyasa is a responsibility, a commitment to guru and God; it is not taken to live one’s own ambitions, but to dedicate one’s totality to guru and God, to live in the service of guru and God. Sannyasa in itself is a philosophy, a sadhana, a lifestyle, a mentality, a samskara, a culture. It has to be cultivated through sadhana, effort, awareness and realization of how you can live your spiritual aspirations. If you choose to live the spiritual aspirations, many times you need to negate the material aspirations, as they are diametrically opposed to each other. Only when you are able to understand all of these things in the right manner can you become a sannyasin, not otherwise.

Some people may think that the purpose of Sannyasa Peeth is to train sannyasins, and I am not denying this. I do think that today’s world needs awakened, creative sannyasins who can go out into society and contribute to its healthy growth and development. For this reason, there will be a provision to train sannyasins here, but this does not mean

‘teaching’ sannyasa. Sannyasa is a lifestyle; it is a discipline, an ideal, a philosophy, a mentality, a culture and a system. You have to understand all these aspects within the larger framework of sannyasa. Those who have a desire to imbue their lives with a transformative and spiritual lifestyle, to imbibe the samskaras and thoughts of a spiritual lifestyle, will have an opportunity to do so. Come and spend fifteen days, a month or two and imbibe spiritual samskaras so you can return to your homes and live a better quality of life. There will be facilities for sannyasins, children, older people – for everyone. One of the purposes of Sannyasa Peeth will be to impart spiritual samskaras and help in developing the ability to understand and implement them.



These were the instructions I received from Sri Swamiji. He told me that this is the inheritance I have received from him. An institution is not an inheritance. Buildings and wealth are not the inheritance of a sadhu. A sadhu's wealth and assets are the qualities he lives with lifelong. It is a disciple's duty to strengthen the ideals that he upholds, lives and conducts himself with every day of his life. This is sannyasa.

Philosophy of sannyasa

What is the philosophy of sannyasa? From the ancient times the *rishis*, the first seers, said the philosophy of a sannyasin is advaita philosophy. The word 'philosophy' is only a loose translation of the actual Sanskrit word 'darshan'. Philosophy is the love of knowledge, whereas *darshan* is the experience of knowledge. For example, when you eat sugar, you taste the sweetness in your mouth. After a while the sweet taste dissolves, but the experience of that sweetness stays with you. Just looking at sugar and saying, "It is sweet" is not enough. Philosophy is exactly that, looking at sugar and saying it is sweet. Darshan, on the other hand, says, "Yes, you are sweet, for I have experienced you."

Advaita is not just a philosophy; it also points towards a certain conduct. It is reflection and action. Philosophy is reflection and conduct is action. One who adopts the philosophy and conduct of advaita is called a sadhu, a sannyasin. This is what Adi Shankara believed. Saints and rishis who came before him believed the same, and sannyasins and sadhus of today also believe this. The advaita thought says there is only one Supreme Self, which is all-pervasive in this creation, just as air is all-pervasive on earth. Air does not have any boundaries. Continents can have boundaries, nations can have boundaries, societies can have boundaries, houses can have boundaries, but air has no boundary. It flows throughout the world continuously without any barrier. You cannot say that this is American air, this is Indian air; you cannot distinguish between them. Air moves continuously

throughout the planet, it is one element that connects every life form on this planet. In the same manner, in this entire creation, one tattwa is predominant. That tattwa, that element, has been called God. Not a manifest God, but an impersonal God. 'G' stands for generation, the quality of Brahma; 'O' for organization, the quality of Narayana; and 'D' for destruction, the quality of Shiva. As a result, in this word 'God', the three qualities of the Supreme Self are defined.

The Supreme Self is inherent in each and every being, object, element, tattwa and life form. Just as air is all-pervasive, the Supreme Self is all-pervasive in creation. The realization of this oneness is advaita. It is that one Supreme Self which, according to the vedic thoughts, manifests in different forms, in millions of forms. When it becomes many, the essence of that cosmic tattwa is also contained in all these millions of forms. For example, water is one tattwa, one element. The essence of water is H_2O , two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. Water can be seen in the ocean, lake, river, your kitchen tap, your bathroom, and also in your body. The essence of all these different bodies of water is still the same: H_2O . When you sweat, it is H_2O ; when you drink water, it is H_2O ; when you swim in the river, it is H_2O ; when you swim in the ocean, it is H_2O . The names are different, the identities are different, the locations are different, but the essence is the same. In the same manner, the Cosmic Self is the one tattwa and in the form of that tattwa, it is contained in each and every particle of creation. A speck of dust has it and a human being has it. This tattwa was called 'Brahman' by the rishis.

It is the realization of the Supreme Self without any distinction, division or categories, which is the philosophy of a sannyasin. Sri Swamiji also says in his satsangs, "Cultivate *atmabhava*, see yourself in others, see your reflection in others; let others see their reflection in you. Be one with them." He is indicating at this idea, this process of advaita. This is the philosophy of advaita.

Advaita means undivided, omnipresent; the Supreme Self is undivided, omnipresent. This idea of omnipresence is blended with ethical matter, which is centred in cosmic order and regulation of the conduct of the whole universe. The Supreme Self regulates the conduct of the whole universe.

Realize your higher nature

The sannyasins of the past have maintained that you have to come to the realization of this higher transcendental nature. This realization, however, does not come through meditation. It comes when you live the life of a sannyasin. Many of you meditate. In the twelve hours of your waking time, maybe for half an hour or one hour you meditate. For eleven hours, you take in impressions from society, the environment, your own mind, emotions and ambitions, and in one hour you want to clear all impressions? It never happens. Therefore, your meditation is unsuccessful. You can find momentary relief, I accept that. You can discharge some tensions from the mind, but if you consider the volume of information you receive in eleven hours compared to the clearing in one hour of meditation practice, there is a big imbalance. In that one hour of meditation you want to have spiritual experiences, without even cleaning the mind, without removing the excess baggage. It will never happen. You can hypnotize yourself, “I am having this experience, I am feeling light, I am seeing light.” You can hypnotize yourself, but that is not an actual attainment or realization.

In the early days of Rikhia, Sri Swamiji had placed a notice on the gate, ‘Do not come again’. He had to disconnect with everything; he had to clear his mind from everything, from all connections. I am also gradually applying the same principle. Of course I am not telling you, “Don’t come again”; you are welcome to come, but I won’t see you. I am now living here in isolation; I can see the usefulness and the need to disconnect from things I was connected with before, and to cultivate a new set of samskaras, thoughts, mentality and culture within myself. When that has happened, then

again I will meet all of you. I am only giving an indication that it is important in the life of a sannyasin to discover his own nature within, by cutting off completely from everything he holds dear in life, including bread and butter, wife, child, home and comfort. This is the philosophy of sannyasa.

Maya: the greatest hypnotist

In order to connect with the higher nature, you must gradually remove the dross of *maya*, delusion and illusion.

When you are born into this life, you become subject to *maya*. It is because of *maya* that the mind is deluded all the time, you don't know what you want, you don't know what you can or should do, and you keep asking everybody, "Do you think this will be good for me?" Others don't know whether it will be good for



you or not. Those who claim to give solutions are greater idiots, as they are bound by their ego and the ego says, "Yes, I can give solutions to their problems. I can help them." You get yourself involved in such head-trips and hassles, and a 'master and victim' game is played.

Maya gives rise to ego. Ego is the 'I' principle. Through this 'I' identification, you experience joy and sorrow, you worry about success and failure, respect and disrespect, lack and plenty, and so on. Ego also creates attachments: "I want, I attain, it is mine, it belongs to me." The more ego grows, the more you allow attachments to grow, and the more you get entangled in the web of *maya* and distance yourself from the Supreme Source. Maya is the greatest hypnotist, she creates everybody. However, she too is a manifestation of God. When she resides with Him in His supreme form, she is called 'yoga



nidra'. When she descends to earth, she is called 'yogamaya', and her job is to confuse human minds, keeping you engaged in the senses so that you do not recognize her for who she is and oppose her ways.

By breaking free from the laws of maya, you make the effort for the discovery of that supreme quality within yourself. This is what all saints do. A saint is nobody's friend; he interacts with everyone, but connects with none. In society you connect with everything: people, places and objects. A very strong attachment to these develops and it is not possible to easily free yourself from their hold. Only those who walk the spiritual path and begin to understand the need to free themselves from maya's hold are able to do so.

Starting point of spiritual journey

The Upanishads have given a clear indication on this subject. They say that before undertaking the spiritual journey, define the purpose of your life. What is the purpose of your life? What do you want from your life: to simply have a good time? Is there some inclination, determination and focus to improve yourself?

The Upanishads say that if you are a spiritual aspirant, if the focus and purpose of your life is to discover the spirituality within you, then first know the description of the Higher Self. Know what the Higher Self can be and what it cannot be; what it is and what it is not. They describe the theory and philosophy of *paramatma*, the Higher Self. They also describe the theory and philosophy of *atma*, the individual self.

Second, make the effort to discover that Higher Self. They give practices to discover your own *atma*, to realize your own inner self, and after realizing the inner self, to realize the Higher Self and see the cosmic essence in each and every one. Third, realize the Higher Self. First, description; second, *sadhana*; and third, realization.

Advaita philosophy

The three concepts the Upanishads expound upon are the starting point of advaita philosophy. Advaita philosophy, in its description of *atma* and *paramatma*, states that what was once supreme, omnipresent and endowed with all qualities, limits itself and descends into a human being as *atma*. Therefore, do not see the two as different, but as an extension of one another. The water in a pond is confined to the dimensions of that pond just as the water in an ocean is confined to the dimensions of the ocean. While they might look different and have different names, both are water. When you look at the water in a pond you can also understand water in an ocean. Similarly, when you experience the *atma* within yourself, you can realize that the same element, which is within you in its all-pervasive form, is *paramatma*.

In the course of history there have been many ideological upheavals and changes, and many people have misinterpreted and misrepresented the advaita philosophy. From time to time, there have been clashes between fanatical and progressive philosophies. Victory has always gone to the progressive, for they believe in looking at life in all its aspects and accepting different points of view, whereas fanatics look at life from only one angle. Due to these misinterpretations of the advaita

thought, the method prescribed to attain spiritual realization was limited to religious rituals. Religion says that if you want to have spiritual realization, follow these religious precepts. Advaita thought says no, one can cultivate these qualities of mind and attain this realization, not necessarily by following a religious ritual, but through *sanyam*, restraint and discipline, and through *shraddha*, faith. When spiritual realization was placed alongside religious rituals, many different schools of thought and sects came to the forefront. The advaita concept was lost. From time to time in our history, however, many gurus have come, gurus who were the propagators of the advaita thought, and we remember them even today.



Shankaracharya's lineage

The division of the lineage of gurus is in two groups: The first is pre-Shankaracharya and the second is post-Shankaracharya. The gurus who came before Shankaracharya are named in the *Vedic Shanti Mantras*: Narayanam, or Lord Vishnu; Padmabhavam, or Brahma; then Vasishtha, then Shakti, Parashar, Vyasa, Shukadeva, Gaudapada, etc.

These are the acharyas who have propagated and disseminated the knowledge of advaitic thought. This lineage starts with Narayana and Brahma. The essence of advaitic thought lies in understanding why Narayana and Brahma were considered the first gurus. According to the mythological stories, Narayana was born from the left side of Shiva and Brahma was born from the right side of Shiva. Shiva represents the unmanifest Self. Narayana takes birth from that unmanifest Self, so Narayana is manifest. Brahma takes birth from that

unmanifest Self, so Brahma is also manifest. The two become the first cosmic forms in creation. As soon as they take form, they come within the ambit of maya, delusion.

Every country has its laws. When you come to India from abroad, you are subject to Indian laws; when Indians travel overseas to another country, they are subject to the laws of that country. In the same manner, when the individual self comes into this life, the laws of this life are governed by maya, not by God. The laws and creation are governed by maya, not by the Supreme Self, thus you become subject to maya. Maya makes you dance to likes and dislikes, passions and dispassion, love and hate, peace and strife. You are dancing between the two poles; this is the rule of maya. In the life of a sannyasin, the disconnection has to take place from maya, not from society, the world, family, friends or associates, but from maya. How can one disconnect from maya and connect with the Higher Self?

Narayana and Brahma, when they were born out of Shiva's body, were also deluded by the power of maya. They started fighting with each other, "I am superior to you!" As soon as you come into the realm of maya, ego becomes predominant. Even Narayana and Brahma fought with each other due to their egos. Although they were born out of divinity, maya deluded them and ego controlled them. In your life too, maya deludes you and ego controls you. To reduce this gap, this separation, the advaita thought comes in. It says, "You may be different, but remember, it is the same cosmic tattwa that is invisible, all-pervasive, omnipotent and omniscient which is in you in the form of spirit." Realize that. Identify with spirit, not with the mind.

In the pre-Shankaracharya tradition, the advaita teachings were passed on by Brahma to Vasishtha, who in turn passed them on to his disciples. His successor, Parashara, passed the knowledge on to Vyasa, and it went further along to Shukadeva. This is how the tradition was created. This is the pre-Shankaracharya tradition. The present guru-disciple tradition of sannyasa begins with Shankaracharya.

Shankaracharya's tradition is our tradition

After Shankara, there was a lineage of masters in which Shankaracharya himself is foremost. His four major disciples are counted in this tradition. Shankaracharya's tradition is our tradition as well. Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda come in this tradition.

Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda believed in, and also lived by, the same advaita principles. Yogis, siddhas and sannyasins identify with their inner state, atma. You have seen the life of Sri Swamiji, you have read about other people, you have heard of Swami Sivananda, you have heard of other saints and sages from different traditions, cultures and religions. What is the uniqueness in their life? Whether it is Saint Francis of Assisi or any other saint, sage or sannyasin, they connect with the spirit, while normal beings connect with the mind. When you connect with spirit, there is nothing good or bad; everything is an expression according to circumstances and situations. When you are connected with the mind, the mind determines what is good and what is bad, as the mind is subject to circumstances and situations. It is not beyond them. That is the main difference. Sannyasa identifies with spirit and life identifies with maya. A sannyasin identifies with atma and a normal person identifies with maya, with the mind.

You shall hear what the parampara, tradition, says about how to manage the influences of maya and connect with the spirit. It will also provide you with an understanding on how Sannyasa Peeth will help bring forth the creative nature of every individual. The creative nature of every individual is not intellectual, artistic or mathematical; it is a very simple nature in which everything is auspicious and right. Whatever you touch turns into gold, not into dust. It is that ability, that quality of life which you need to develop, not only as a sannyasin, but also as a normal person so you can experience true spirituality in your life.

The Sannyasa Tradition

13 July 2011

Our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, had inspired three movements: the first being that of yoga, centred in Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yoga Peeth; the second being that of seva, centred in Rikhiapeeth; the third, learning about sannyasa as an alternate lifestyle, which is centred in Sannyasa Peeth.

A new concept of sannyasa

We have to be clear about one thing at the very outset. The guru is not an ordinary individual like the rest of us. The guru's consciousness and mind are not related to this world, but dedicated, devoted and connected to God. Their consciousness is one with the higher consciousness. This is what distinguishes ordinary people from extraordinary people. When a person's focus is pointed towards things that are ordinary and worldly, they are within the ambit of maya, they are embroiled in maya. When, with the strength of sankalpa and sadhana, the same person is able to free himself from the influence of maya and has his mind centred in God, such a person is called guru. A guru is, in reality, a sannyasin. A sannyasin is not a renunciate, sadhaka, or tapasvi. He is one who has dedicated his life to the search for truth and God.

Sannyasa is not merely renunciation of the home, family and society, but is a mentality, a samskara, a philosophy, a lifestyle, a character. The whole concept of sannyasa can be understood if you split the word 'sannyasa'. *Sam* means total,

everything, and *nyasa* means to place in trust. Therefore, *sannyasa* literally means that you place in trust all that you have received from the Higher Source: your mind, your thoughts, your emotions, your creativity, your qualities. What kind of trust? A trust which can help you connect with each and every one around you. Understand this carefully. People think of *sannyasa* as renunciation, but *sannyasa* is connection; connection with oneself, one's mind, spirit and creativity, with knowledge and dispassion, and with a philosophy which guides every step of life.

Those who wear robes, shave their heads, adopt a mantra and a guru claim to be *sannyasins* without having undergone the basic training and understanding of *sannyasa*. Just by virtue of having taken initiation and changing their robes they say they have become *sannyasins*. When the guru gives you *sannyasa*, it is like you receive a college degree on the first day of your admission, and then you have to undertake the study. The guru gives you *sannyasa* with the trust and understanding that you will live the life of a *sannyasin*. Yet, when you take *sannyasa*, *sannyasa* goes to your head, it inflates your ego, and you begin to say, "I have become a *sannyasin*", without understanding even the basic concept or precept of *sannyasa*.

When you devote your abilities and skills to God and perform actions according to His instructions, then you earn the title of a *sannyasin*. In order to understand this, you have to look at the philosophy, lifestyle, mentality and character of a *sannyasin*, and how a *sannyasin* can make himself or herself useful for the upliftment of human society. In this context, the philosophy of *sannyasa*, which is Advaita Vedanta, should be understood.

Omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence

Advaita philosophy in English has been translated as 'monism'. However, it only states one fact: the Supreme Being is one, and everything else is part of that Supreme Being. Everything is an extension, projection and manifestation of

that Supreme Being, whether an animate or an inanimate object. The entire creation is an expression of the strength and the quality of that Supreme Being. This was the realization that the rishis and yogis had in remote history before the emergence of any organized thought, religion, belief or philosophy. The first and foremost, the original philosophy of this world, and more specifically of this country where the sannyasa tradition developed, is that everything we perceive in this universe, visible to the eyes, understood and recognized by the senses, is nothing but a projection of that higher consciousness: *Eko brahma dwitiyo nasti*. There is nothing except that Higher Self pervading this universe, which knows no boundaries. It is not contained in anything, it is all-pervasive.

Omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence are the three attributes of the Cosmic Self. The first recognition of the Supreme Being came in the form of omnipresence, present everywhere. The Supreme Self is omnipresent. It



pervades each and every aspect and dimension of creation. Its presence can be felt in animated beings and also in all inanimate objects. Take the example of air. Air is present everywhere on this planet. There is not a single place devoid of air, whether it is the deepest cave or the highest mountain. Land can be divided into boundaries, countries, continents, into recognizable and defined areas, but air flows freely through the entire earth without remaining confined or limited to one area. Just as air can flow without any hindrance all over the globe, in the same manner, this cosmic principle, this param tattwa, this Supreme Being is all-pervasive.

There is a story about an enlightened master who tested his students. He called his students and gave each one of them a banana with the instruction that they were to eat the banana but under one condition. They were to eat it in such a place where they would not be seen by anyone. Some students hid in the bathroom, some went into the bottom of a well, and some concealed themselves behind trees. After they had eaten their banana, they returned to the teacher and reported that they had completed the task. The teacher noticed that all the students had eaten their bananas. One student, however, still had the banana in his hand. The teacher asked, "Why have you not eaten the banana?" The student replied, "The condition that you specified made it impossible for me to complete the task. You said that we had to eat the banana where we would not be seen by anyone. I cannot understand where I could go and not be seen by God. If I hide in a well, God can see me there; if I climb a tree, God can see me; if I hide in a cave and try to eat, God is there too. Can you please tell me of a place where God is not present and I can go to eat my banana?" Hearing this, the teacher was pleased and said, "You are the only one who has imbibed the teachings. All the students have received the teachings, but none of them have been able to take it in; you are the only one who has done so. That is why you found it difficult to find a place to eat the banana where you would not be seen. The others were happy to hide in the bathroom

or in their quarters, or conceal themselves in caves or behind trees and eat their banana.”

Omnipresence is the first attribute of this divine, supreme nature. The rishis have said that the *tattva*, element, which is omnipresent, has manifested in many forms, in millions of forms. It is contained within you, too. You are like water. No matter whether water is contained in a glass, is flowing in a lake, river, brook or ocean, its essence is the same. You are different beings, but the essence of your life, the purpose and state of your life, is the same as the Higher Self, the Cosmic Self. Atma is here within the body and paramatma is omnipresent. Atma is a single unit, a single experience of that omnipresent element. You are the manifestation, the projection of that higher cosmic principle.

The higher cosmic principle, when it manifests in many different forms, becomes subject to maya. *Maya* means delusion and also the created universe. Everything is created is maya. Everything in which you can see a form, a name, a quality is subject to maya. It is because of maya that you perceive each thing as different. There is maya in your mind, therefore you see yourself as different from another person. That is the influence of maya on the mind. It is this influence which separates you from your divine source, from your transcendental source.

Kabir Das, a famous Indian saint and poet, has said,

*Jala mein kumbha, kumbha mein jala hai, baahar bheetara paani
Phootahi kumbha, jala jala hee samana, baata kahe yeh jnani*

Pitcher in water, water in the pitcher, water out and inside;
The pitcher breaks, water becomes one with water, so
say the wise.

The same applies to human beings. God resides in you and God is in everything around you. The body restricts you from understanding this truth. If you are able to free yourself from desires, attractions and attachments of the body, then you will see God in all.



If that cosmic tattwa is present in each and every one, then just by virtue of being present in each one, it also becomes omniscient. It knows what is going on in me; it knows what is going on in you.

Our ancestors, sages and rishis have said, “The purpose of life is to rediscover your connection with that cosmic principle.” Due to the delusion of maya, you identify with this world of sense objects and find it difficult to comprehend that there can be something beyond the grasp of the senses and the mind. Some people can accept this fact, but others find it difficult. They ask, “How can something exist which we cannot perceive through the senses? How can something exist which cannot be understood through our minds, our intellect or our logic?” That is the confusion people have.

That cosmic principle, the cosmic tattwa, is all-pervasive and all-knowing. Due to this all-pervasiveness and all-knowingness, it is omnipotent. Thus, omnipresence is the first attribute of the Cosmic Self, omniscience is the second attribute of the Cosmic Self, and omnipotence is the third attribute of the Cosmic Self. It is this discovery, this realization that has to become the focus, the aim or goal of life. That is the philosophy of sannyasa.

Atmabhava is advaita

There have been many masters who have taught the philosophy of advaita to humanity, in the past and also in the present. Their main teaching has been, “Free yourself from maya’s hold through right action, right thought and right behaviour. Once truth dawns in life, duality disappears.” Life is a play between the mind and maya. If you connect your mind with maya you are a bhogi, and if you connect your mind with God you are a yogi. Only the disciple who follows the guru’s instructions to the letter can untangle himself from maya’s grip.

We as sannyasins are followers of that advaitic philosophy: to discover the presence of that universal spirit within us. Sri Swamiji, our guru, has given us many indications on how to come to the realization of that higher power within us, of that higher nature within us. He says, “Cultivate *atmabhava*. Cultivate the ability to see yourself in other people. Only when you can see yourself in other people will you understand what they are going through in life. If you cannot see yourself in other people, this separation will remain all the time; me and you, the haves and the have nots, the rich and the poor. This division will always be there. If you can cultivate atmabhava, if you can see yourself reflected in other people, then you will develop faith, love and compassion; you will develop the soft qualities of life which will connect you with other beings around you.” This teaching of Sri Swamiji is the teaching of advaita philosophy. He has taught it to us as it is relevant today. It is an integral teaching of sannyasa life.

The legacy of Dattatreya

In the lineage of masters, there is a towering personality who was the first paramahansa. The paramahansa tradition begins with him, and his name is Dattatreya. He was son of a rishi couple, his father was Rishi Atri and his mother was Anasuya, one of the great rishis of the past. Atri and Anasuya also had two other children. One was Soma or Chandrama, the moon; another was Durvasa, the Sage Durvasa famous

in history for his anger. Dattatreya was the third son. It was believed, even back then, that Dattatreya had elements of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva within him. That is why his name has the suffix *treya* meaning three. *Datta* means the one who gives. The name therefore means ‘the three bestowers’.

The first two sons of Atri and Anasuya left home. Soma became the king of a region, so he left the hermitage. Durvasa wanted to perform austerities, so he also left the hermitage to live in isolation and solitude. Dattatreya stayed behind. When Dattatreya attained the age of eighteen, he wanted to take sannyasa. He went to his father and said, “Father, give me permission for sannyasa. I want to follow the path of the rishis. I want to follow the path that the sages and illuminators of human civilization have walked upon.” Atri said to his son, “From my side you have permission, but leave only if your mother gives you permission.”

Dattatreya then went to his mother and said, “Mother, please permit me to leave this hermitage and take sannyasa, to live like a sannyasin and walk the path of the rishis and saints.” The mother went into shock. She said, “How can that be possible? Your two brothers have left, now only you are left here in the hermitage. You are my son, how can I give you permission to renounce everything and go out with nothing? What will you eat? Where will you sleep? What will you wear?”

This is the character of mothers. They only think of three things in relation to their child: what the child is going to eat, what the child is going to wear and where the child is going to sleep. These are the three characters, three attachments of the mother in relation to the child: food, clothing and sleep. She said to Dattatreya, “No, I cannot give you permission. You are my child, what will you eat in the forest? Who will cook for you? Will you live on berries and fruit? Where will you sleep? You don’t have a room in the forest; you will have to sleep under a tree. It may rain, and snakes and scorpions abound there. They may bite you. What will you wear? Leaves? Here we can provide you with good clothes. We can

get you clothes from other kingdoms and you can wear them and live happily.”

Dattatreya said, “Mother please tell me one thing. To what are you attached? Are you attached to this body? Are you attached to this mind? Are you attached to the spirit?” The mother said, “Look, I can’t see your spirit and I can’t see your mind. What I can see is you, your body in front of me. Therefore, you can say that I am attached to your body.” Dattatreya said, “Mother, tell me one more thing. This attachment that you have for my body, is it for my skin?” It is said that ‘Beauty is only skin deep’. Once you peel the skin off the body, everybody looks the same. Only through the skin can one look beautiful or ugly, but if you remove the skin, there is no beauty and there is no ugliness, everybody looks the same. Dattatreya told his mother, “You are attached to the skin, the fairness of the skin. If I remove the skin and leave it with you, will you be happy?” The mother said, “How can you say that you will peel off your skin?” Dattatreya said, “Yes, your attachment is not with my spirit, your attachment is not with my mind, your attachment is with my body. This body has the covering of skin and it is the skin which makes one ugly or beautiful. If you remove the skin, everybody looks the same. There is no beauty, there is no ugliness; it is just one form.”

The mother realized her son was saying something of great importance and she said, “Son, enlighten me. What do you mean?” Dattatreya said, “Mother, the mind of every individual is the cause of bondage and liberation. The mind creates bondages, attachments, associations, and the mind also becomes the cause of liberation and freedom from these associations and attachments. Therefore, try to understand the mind.” These are the teachings of Dattatreya, an eighteen-year-old boy to his mother, who was a rishi. He said, “Mother, the mind is the cause of happiness and sorrow, both. The mind is the cause of bondage and freedom, both. Attachment is a *swabhava*, a character, a nature, a habit of the mind. Without that nature, without that habit, without that expression, the mind cannot exist.”

Sri Swamiji says the same thing: no one can be free from attachment. He gives the example of a bucket of water. The water in a bucket will look different if you just add a few drops of black ink to it. These drops will change the colour of the water completely. Attachment also colours the water of the mind in the same manner. Even a tiny drop of attachment changes the nature of the mind. Two drops, and it becomes even blacker. If you add a whole bottle, it becomes completely black. How can you free yourself from this attachment? Is it possible to separate the drop of black ink from the bucket of water? Not possible. It is not possible to separate the ink from the water. In the same manner, it is not possible to separate attachment from the mind.

What, then, is the solution? Sri Swamiji said, just keep adding more water. As the water in the bucket keeps increasing, the colour becomes diluted until it reaches the point where the colour is not seen at all, only clear water is seen. This does not imply that the attachment has been removed; it just means that the attachment has become dissolved in the water.

It is this idea that Dattatreya conveyed to his mother, “Right now, you are attached to me. I’m not asking you to detach yourself, I am asking you to transfer this attachment from me to some other place. What can be better than God to transfer this attachment to? Instead of being attached to me, try to attach yourself to God.” His mother said, “How can that be possible? How can I detach myself from you and move my attachment from you and connect it to God?”

Dattatreya told his mother, “One of the simplest ways of attaching yourself to God is to keep company of the pious, good and spiritual-minded people. Keep company of the devotees, bhaktas and jnanis. Through your association, you will cultivate faith. Once you have cultivated faith, you will develop bhakti. Bhakti will link you with God and will give birth to *vairagya*, dispassion, in life.” In one of the scriptures of India, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, it is mentioned that bhakti has two sons: *vairagya* and *jnana*. Once you attain bhakti, you



will have the two sons. Vairagya is dispassion and *jnana* is realization. This is what Dattatreya told his mother. With the company of pious people, through right association, discussion and understanding, you will be able to cultivate faith.

This particular idea has been emphasized in the *Bhagavad Gita* as well as the *Ramayana*. It is said in the *Ramayana: Prathama bhakti santan kara sanga* – “The first form of bhakti is association with the virtuous and the pious.” The same idea has been emphasized by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*, which state (33:2):

*Maitri karuna muditopeksanam
Sukha dukha punyaapunya visayanam bhavanataschitta
prasadanam*

Be friendly with those who are contented in life. Be happy for those who are virtuous in life. Be compassionate towards those who suffer in life and ignore the crooked.

One rotten apple can spoil a whole basket of apples. One rotten apple will spoil the taste of all the other apples and all the good apples cannot change the rottenness of one apple. Sage Patanjali has said very clearly, “Ignore the crooked because you can never help them. Be compassionate towards those who are suffering. Be happy for those who are virtuous and pious, and be friendly with those who are contented and happy.” Dattatreya made the same statement many thousands of years ago to his mother. With the company of pious people, you cultivate faith and satsang, and from satsang, you cultivate *shraddha*, faith. Once you have *shraddha* in your life, then *bhakti* will develop and evolve. With the emergence of *bhakti* in your life, dispassion and knowledge will come in. That dispassion, *bhakti* and faith will connect you with your Higher Self, with your Transcendental Self, with the Cosmic Self.

Anasuya asked, “Who is the epitome of piety and goodness in life?” Dattatreya replied, “Guru is the epitome of piety and virtue in life. Therefore, have *bhakti* for the guru.” This is the statement of Dattatreya. He said, “Guru is the manifest form of that divine energy. Divine energy, the Cosmic Self, is invisible, but guru represents that invisible cosmic power in a physical form. Guru can be perceived in two ways: *vyakta* and *avyakta*, manifest and unmanifest. The *vyakta* guru can be identified by the senses and the mind, and the *avyakta* guru can be realized by the inner nature, the inner spirit. Connect your mind and your senses to guru and to the teachings of the guru. If you do that, your heart will connect with the transcendental guru.”

Dattatreya has given a simple sequence to his mother that she could follow to attain enlightenment. When Dattatreya said to his mother, “Find a guru,” she asked, “What will a guru do for me?” Dattatreya said, “The guru will initiate you; you will have a connection with the guru and that initiation will protect you from problems, difficulties, conflicts and tensions in life.”

If you analyze your life, you will discover that in times of crises, faith in the guru and mantra have helped you. I am

sure many of you have gone through this experience. In times of crises, tension and strife, the remembrance of guru and awareness of the mantra have taken you out of that situation. There is no logic to it. It simply indicates the connection one has, a pure connection, a heart-to-heart connection between the disciple and the guru. Dattatreya explained that guru in the manifest form is only an extension of that Cosmic Self. If you connect with a guru who is vyakta, who is in front of you, and if you can connect with that guru through the senses and the mind, then you will have protection from every injury and difficulty.

Once you are protected from the influences of maya, then your heart will open up and it will realize the Cosmic Guru, the Cosmic Self. In this manner, Dattatreya became the guru of his own mother by giving these instructions. She realized the value of what Dattatreya was saying and she accepted him, her son, as her guru. Then she gave permission to Dattatreya to depart from the hermitage. She said, “You have opened my eyes; I shall follow what you have told me. I give you my permission to go out and to spread light wherever you go.”

Dattatreya was the first paramahansa. The paramahansa tradition starts with him, and we belong to that tradition of paramahansas. He is an illuminator of this advaita school of thought. As the stories tell us, he initiated not only tens or hundreds of people, but thousands into mantra. Sri Swamiji once said that the only person, the only guru who has given a universal mantra to each and every one in this country is Dattatreya, as he was concerned with the emancipation of everyone. He was not an organization-minded person. He was not a disciple-oriented guru who wanted to have his disciples around him. He just wanted to spread light. He did not see anyone as high born or low born. For him, everyone was equal. The brahmin and the chandala had the same position in his mind. The scavenger and the learned pandit were the same for him.

Even today, throughout the entire country, people respect and honour him and his teachings. The stories of Dattatreya

are particularly alive in the western part of the country, in Gujarat and Maharashtra, as that was the area where he lived. There, even now, in every village, the name of this one person, Dattatreya, Datta Bhagavan, is on everyone's lips.



The legacy of Shankaracharya

Time passed. Another enlightened being came into existence and that was Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya was also a very gifted person. As a child of eight, he went to his mother and said, "Give me permission to take sannyasa." As a child, he had the power to invoke the divine grace. Once he went for alms to one poor family's home and said, "*Bhiksham dehi*" – "Give me alms." The lady of the house came out with one *amla*, myrobalan. She

said, "Look, I have nothing in my home to give you except this *amla*, this small fruit, please accept it." Shankaracharya could not bear the poverty of this woman. His spirit melted. He said to himself, "What is this? There is no food in this person's house. She has a family, she has a child, she has a husband; they are going to starve. They have only this little fruit to eat between all of them?" He prayed then and there to the Cosmic Shakti, "Mother, remove the poverty of these people." As the story goes, because of his prayer, there was a rain of golden coins upon that house and the family became affluent. He had the power to invoke the divine grace, he was a gifted child with great spiritual powers, yet he lived a very ordinary life.

It was Shankaracharya who became the codifier of the sannyasa tradition. He brought together all the sadhus and sannyasins of India under the umbrella of the Dashnami

tradition. The sadhus and sannyasins that lived in the mountains got the suffix 'Parvat'; those who dwelled in the forest were called 'Aranya'; sannyasins who lived along the coastal areas were called 'Sagar'; those involved in the research and dissemination of knowledge were called 'Saraswati'. In this manner, he organized the sannyasins in ten groups called Dashnami Sannyasins. Shankaracharya knew that for the upliftment of society, the propagation of one thought was required, so he also gave them one common ideology: advaita. He said that they were to spread this philosophy, as the differences perceived in the world are due to maya; however, within each and every object is just one tattwa. Search for it, seek it out.

We belong to the Dashnami tradition. We are sannyasins of the Shankaracharya order. Shankaracharya united the entire nation in one idea, one thought and one philosophy: Advaita Vedanta. However, Shankaracharya also had to go through a process of opening himself and transcending maya. He believed that Brahman is everything, God is everything, and he would conceive of Brahman as a masculine power and was never comfortable with the idea of Shakti, the feminine power. He wrote brilliant and unparalleled commentaries on *Brahma Sutras*, on the Upanishads, on the *Bhagavad Gita* and on many other texts. He was a person of great intellect. Nevertheless, one door was still closed in his life.

The story goes that to open the door, Shiva and Parvati had to come down in the guise of an old couple. Shiva took the form of an old man and Parvati took the form of a young woman, and they came to Varanasi. Shiva played the role of being dead, an old man who died on the streets of Varanasi. Parvati, the young wife, sat with the head of the old man in her lap and started to wail and cry. It was early in the morning and Shankaracharya was going to the river Ganga for a bath along with his disciples. There he saw this woman, blocking the path with a dead body. He said, "Mother, please remove this dead body." The young woman said, "How can this dead body move without Shakti? You don't recognize

Shakti, but remember that without Shakti nothing can move in this world. Brahman is all-pervasive and permanent, sure, but without Shakti, even that power, that force, is ineffective.” Similarly, within your body the strength is hidden, but that strength can be used from time to time to lift up paper, a chair, a table, an almirah. Each time, the use of that force, the use of that shakti will be different. In the same manner, within Brahman Himself is Shakti; Shakti is an integral aspect of Brahman.

“How can this dead body which is devoid of Shakti move without her?” This statement opened the eyes of Shankaracharya. He said, “Thank you, mother, for enlightening me. I was wrong.” When he accepted that he was wrong for not recognizing Shakti before this moment, the dead body and that woman disappeared. He realized they were Shiva and Parvati who had come to open his eyes to the fact that *Shakti*, energy, is an integral principle of the Cosmic Self.

Shankaracharya became an advocate of Brahman and Shakti both, Shiva and Shakti both. He accepted the existence of the two. His experiences, feelings and thoughts can be discovered in the verses of *Saundarya Lahari* and *Ananda Lahari*. In the opening verse he states:

*Shivah shaktyaa yukto yadi bhavati shaktah prabhavitum
Na chedevam devo na khalu kushalah spanditumapi*

“Shiva, when united with Shakti, is endowed with the power to create, protect and destroy the universe; otherwise he is unable even to stir.”

Shiva without Shakti is non-functional. Shakti is the supreme, but she hides herself within Shiva. This was the revelation that came to Shankaracharya through the grace of Shiva and Shakti. After that, endowed with this force and grace, Shankaracharya conquered the thoughts and the minds of all sects and traditions of this country, and became the universal master.

Shankaracharya said to people, “What is the reason for man to take birth on this earth again and again? Just so he can connect with the divine: *Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi janani jathare shayanam* – “One takes birth and dies, one returns to the mother’s womb again and again.” For what purpose? It is so that each time you can remember God, you can remember the divine and grow closer to Him and realize Him.” It is his teachings that we follow today in sannyasa.



Eternal Teachings of the Parampara

14 July 2011

Today is the 14th of July, the day that Sri Swami Sivananda attained maha samadhi in 1963. Therefore, today we remember him, pay our respects to his memory and honour him, for he was the guide to so many spiritual aspirants who became masters in their own right, spreading the light of yoga, Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy of sannyasins, far and wide.

Lord Shiva's promise

It is known that Swami Sivananda had come with a special destiny. In fact, if you look at the lives of all the realized beings and masters of the world, you will discover that they have lived their own destinies which have taken them closer to the realization of their Inner or Higher Self. After having attained this realization, they have come to help us all; they have come to help humanity transcend its own limitations. Swami Sivananda is one such towering spiritual personality of this country who advocated the understanding and application of the principles of the advaitic philosophy in life.

The story of Swami Sivananda begins seven generations before he was born. In South India, there lived a great and well known saint, Appaiyya Dikshitar. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. Pleased with his devotion, conviction and faith, Lord Shiva appeared to Appaiyya Dikshitar one night

in his dream and said, “I will take birth in your family after seven generations and that is my boon to you.” This vision disappeared when Appaiyya Dikshitar woke up. True to his word, after seven generations, Lord Shiva appeared in a dream to Swami Sivananda’s mother and said, “As promised, I am coming.” And Swami Sivananda was born.

There are two aspects in the life of a saint. The first is physical, born of certain parents, father and mother. That is what we all see, that this person belongs to such and such family. However, souls with a mission, souls who have come to guide humanity, do not take birth out of their own whim, but in response to a mandate given by God. God gave an indication, and seven generations later, Swami Sivananda took birth.

When a child is born, its consciousness awakens gradually. The samskaras of the past awaken gradually. They don’t awaken overnight. The same thing happened in the life of Swami Sivananda. He lived with his family, with his parents, and he developed a very deep spiritual inclination and attraction to the company of wise people, saints and sages, and would visit different temples and pray to God for direction and grace in his life.

The spiritual flame is ignited

Swami Sivananda became a medical doctor and went to Malaya, now Malaysia. There he worked on a banana farm as a doctor. One day, a sadhu came to Malaya and visited the place where this doctor was working and gave him a book. The title of the book was *Brahma Vichara*, or ‘Reflections on Spirituality’. After Swami Sivananda read the book, he knew he was being called by the Himalayas to fulfil a destiny, to fulfil a role that was preordained. Overnight, he gave away everything he possessed to all his patients: clothes, money, medicines, everything. He took one small bag, boarded a ship and came back to India, landing in Madras, now Chennai. When he landed at the Chennai port, he called a friend of his and said, “Please, give this suitcase to my family. I am not

going to go home, I am being called by the spiritual powers in the Himalayas and that is my destination.” From Chennai port he went to the railway station, got on a train and stopped in Varanasi on his way to the mountains.

From Varanasi, he walked, as the money he had been carrying was finished; he had only the clothes he was wearing on his body. He started to walk towards the mountains, and eventually he reached Haridwar. This was in the beginning of the 1920s. At that time, the entire region consisted of forest and wild beasts, with very few hamlets situated in little pockets of civilization. Near Haridwar, he sat down under a tree, thinking, ‘How can I find a master, a guide, a guru who can show me the way, the path?’ It was daytime and he was reclining against the tree with his eyes closed, thinking, ‘Where can I find my guru? Who will be my guru? Where do I go?’ While he was thinking in this manner, he felt a shadow come across his face. He felt that somebody had come in front of him and he opened his eyes. Before him stood a majestic looking sannyasin, tall, well-built, with a shaved head, geru robes and holding a yoga danda and mala. This sadhu asked Swami Sivananda, who was called Dr Kuppuswami at that time, “What are you looking for, my son?” Swami Sivananda immediately stood up, bowed before him and said, “I am looking for a guru. Can you please guide me on where I can find my guru?” The sadhu said, “I have come to initiate you into sannyasa.” Then and there, under the tree, this sannyasin gave Swami Sivananda initiation into sannyasa and named him Swami Sivananda Saraswati. After initiating Swami Sivananda, the sadhu left.

Nobody knows who that swami was, from where he had come or where he was going. Even today, we do not know who that personality was who initiated Swami Sivananda into sannyasa. All disciples have looked long and hard for a trace, but in vain. The only thing we do know is the sadhu’s name, Swami Vishwananda Saraswati. It seems that Shiva himself came down, because it was the promise of Shiva that “I will be born in your family,” and he came down in this



form of Swami Vishwananda, initiated Swami Sivananda, and inspired and ignited the spiritual flame in his heart. That was the only encounter that Swami Sivananda had with his master. A meeting of fifteen minutes and that was it. In fifteen minutes, the disciple and guru became one. The guru gave Swami Sivananda shaktipat and entered his body and Swami Sivananda, infused with the inspiration and power of his guru, went onwards to Rishikesh. There, in an ashram called Paramartha Niketan, he was given a mud hut to live in where he could perform his sadhanas. For food, he had to go to the town, to the hamlet of Rishikesh, and ask for alms. This was the routine of Swami Sivananda. He lived a life of tapasya, sadhana and seva.

Day and night, Swami Sivananda would care for people who were sick or suffering and perform his own sadhanas. Once a day, every day, he would go out to beg for alms. Whatever he would receive, such as a few rotis and dal from the Kali Kamliwalla Kshetram, he would eat, and return to the ashram.

When a flower blooms, honey bees will come to the flower to collect the pollen. The spiritual radiance of Swami

Sivananda attracted many young spiritual aspirants and they came to him, lived with him, served him, and learned the lessons of *seva*, *sadhana*, *yoga*, *Vedanta* and *advaita* philosophy. These disciples became masters in their own right. They were enlightened. If a fire is lit in one place and you put in another piece of wood, the wood will be ignited too. In the same manner, the spiritual fire was ignited within everyone who came in contact with Swami Sivananda. They also became luminous.

The torch is passed from guru to disciple

History says Shankaracharya had four main disciples. Ramakrishna Paramahansa had one main disciple. However, all the sannyasin disciples of Swami Sivananda who were initiated by him and within whom the spiritual fire was lit were as great and illuminated as their master. All the disciples of Swami Sivananda became like Swami Sivananda. History bears witness to this. All his disciples are stalwarts in their own right, they are masters who have guided and inspired many to discover peace, contentment and inner union with the Higher Self. Our own guru, Sri Swami Satyananda is one such disciple.

If you put forty sticks of wood in fire, they will all begin to burn and become fire. In the same manner, the disciples of Swami Sivananda opened their minds, their hearts, and their lives in front of him and Swami Sivananda entered into them. The guru *tattwa* became alive in all of them. Swami Sivananda infused the ideals of *seva*, service; *sadhana*, perfection; *samarpanam*, dedication and *shraddha*, conviction and faith in his disciples and everything came alive in each of these disciples.

Do you have the ability to open yourself for the guru to enter into your life? I have not seen anybody who Sri Swamiji was able to enter into because everyone remained closed. Frankly speaking, Sri Swamiji has only two main disciples: one in Munger, one in Rikhia and that is all, although he has initiated many. Everybody has closed their doors, not

understanding the relationship between guru and disciple. Rather, they used the guru as a tool to fulfil their own ambitions. Even today, people use the name of Sri Swamiji to fulfil their own ambitions.

A practical sadhana to attain peace

Swami Sivananda used to say, “You cannot be enlightened through meditation. You can practise meditation because it pleases you, but do not expect any results from meditation except self-hypnosis.” In order to derive the maximum benefit from meditation, you have to fine-tune your personality, character and nature. How many people do that? Nobody wants to change their nature, mentality, behaviour or thought, yet they want to practise meditation to have higher experiences of life.

Swami Sivananda guided each one. His instructions were, “You do whatever you have to do: your hatha yoga, raja yoga, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, mantra yoga, practise your japa, do everything. At the same time, make the effort, the attempt to change the quality of the mind.” He gave eighteen points by which one can improve the quality of the mind, personality and nature.

One has to make the effort to maintain serenity in all situations and conditions of life. You are all subject to stress, tension, anxiety, frustration and depression. You are unable to maintain your inner peace. You get swayed by the power and force of ambitions, desires and ideas. This gives birth to pleasure and pain. Whether you are in pain or pleasure, the mind is never balanced or centred. It is not balanced and centred in pain or suffering and it is not even balanced and centred in happiness or contentment. You move from a state of distress to eustress and from eustress to distress, and there is never any balance.

Swami Sivananda used to say, “A conscious effort has to be made to maintain the serenity and peace in one’s life. It is something that has to be taken up as a sadhana, just as you take up mantra or meditation as a sadhana. Cultivation

of serenity in life should be a sadhana. Do not expect that serenity will be a reaction, a response or an outcome of things that you do. Rather, make the attempt to discover your inner peace and serenity.” In this manner, he gave eighteen points that are referred to as the ‘Eighteen Ities’ of Swami Sivananda. The first ‘ity’ is serenity: acquire serenity, strive for serenity, work for serenity, observe those situations and conditions which distract you, and manage them so that you are able to remain serene. The second ‘ity’ is regularity; whatever you do, be regular in it. If you do your job, be regular in it; if you do your sadhana, be regular in it. Find time and be regular, no matter how busy you are. You always find time to eat and drink. You always find time to gossip and sleep. In the same manner, no matter how busy you are, always find the time



and be regular in your effort to improve yourself. The effort to improve oneself is called sadhana.

The third 'ity' is absence of vanity. Remove vanity from your mind because vanity distracts the mind from its purpose. The fourth 'ity' is sincerity. Be sincere in thought, word and deed. Next, simplicity; be simple. Do not pretend to be what you are not. Do not put on different masks to project a particular self-image; just be natural, be simple, live life in a simple manner, in a natural way. These are the instructions that Swami Sivananda has given: serenity, regularity, absence of vanity, sincerity, simplicity, veracity, equanimity, fixity. Be focused on your goal. Non-irritability: do not get irritated by little pinpricks and mosquito bites. Maintain your non-irritable nature, do not get irritated. Adaptability: learn to adapt to every situation and condition. Just as water can take any form as it flows over stones, through holes and around curves, in the same manner, learn to adapt to different situations in life. Cultivate humility to manage your own ego expressions. Then cultivate integrity, tenacity, nobility and magnanimity. Finally, cultivate charity and generosity, and attain purity.

In this manner, Swami Sivananda outlined eighteen points or ideas by which one can modify the mental, external and social behaviour to discover and attain peace within oneself. Once you are endowed with these eighteen qualities, real spiritual development will take place. Until then, you are only flirting with whatever you do, whether it is meditation, yoga, kriya, or company of the guru.

It is recommended that sincere spiritual seekers pick one item per month or year and develop that quality in their life. If you want to cultivate serenity in your life, pick that as one thing and work on it. Observe the situations, observe the conditions which affect, disturb and distract you, which take away your mental balance, peace and harmony, and remove yourself from those negative influences to maintain your serenity. Work at it for a month, for two months, for three months, for one year. If you can, cultivate one quality every

year. In eighteen years, the spiritual light will manifest in you. If you do not do it, for forty years you can meditate and you will still have to face the reactions and responses of your mind, as it has happened until now.

In such a simple way, Swami Sivananda would explain the process of spiritual life. He would inspire people to adopt one quality, one nature, so the spiritual journey would become very smooth and pleasurable for everyone. Right from the beginning, he would inspire people to cultivate the *drashta bhava*, witnessing attitude. He used to say one thing very clearly, “You can read any scripture, any book; you can use your intellect any time, but remember that intellect will never give you enlightenment. You can read about God, you can read about other seekers in the world, intellectually try to understand them and that is fine, but you will never have realization, you will never have experience. Experience can only come through faith. Realization can only come through faith, not through the intellect. Intellect is necessary for knowing and faith is necessary for experiencing and realizing.” In this manner, he inspired many people to live a simple and gentle life.

Be innocent and pure of heart

There is an event of simplicity and naturalness in the life of Swami Sivananda. Once a sadhu came to him and said, “A special nine-day celebration for Navaratri is going to be held in about twenty days’ time. During that time, it is my wish to worship the Cosmic Mother by offering her ornaments, food and clothes.” He said that in the course of conversation. Swami Sivananda heard him and that was the end of it. One morning, as the time of Navaratri drew near, there was a knock on the door of the sadhu’s hut. When he opened the door, he saw three young women, standing there with three plates full of clothes, ornaments and food items. They said, “Swami Sivananda has sent this for you so you can worship the Mother with these items.” When these beautiful girls mentioned the name of Swami Sivananda, the sadhu thought,

“He must have told some of his disciples to bring these items to me because he knew of my intention to worship the Cosmic Mother.” He accepted the gifts which the girls had brought.

In the evening, he went to Swami Sivananda’s room and knocked on the door. Swami Sivananda opened the door and the sadhu said, “Thank you very much for all the gifts that you sent this morning.” Swami Sivananda said, “I have not sent you any gifts.” The sadhu said, “Yes, the girls said they were sent by you.” Swami Sivananda said, “Mother sent the gifts to you.” The sadhu said, “You must be a great devotee of Mother because She heard your prayers. I have been asking Her for so many years and She has never listened to my prayers. I spoke with you, you must have prayed and Mother sent everything. You are a great devotee of the Cosmic Mother.” Swami Sivananda laughed and said, “I don’t know what worship is, I don’t know what pooja and ritual are. I follow a simple precept in life: whenever I see any girl, I think she is my Saraswati. I repeat a mantra mentally and bow down before her. Whenever I see a woman, I think she is my Durga. I repeat a Durga mantra in my mind and bow down to her. Whenever I see a woman, I think she is my Lakshmi. I repeat a mantra mentally and bow down to her. That’s all I do.”

I am telling you this story to exemplify the innocence and simplicity in Swami Sivananda’s life. He was not a person involved in rituals and complicated systems of sadhana and pooja. Rather, in a simple, gentle and innocent manner, he used to feel the connection of his heart with those of other people. He would honour and respect that connection. Due to that, he became the owner and master of all the wealth and virtues of the world which are divine in nature.

Once there was a sadhu, a mahatma, who performed austerities over several years with just one motive, to have darshan of his beloved, his God. The strength of his austerities was such that one day God appeared before him. The sadhu prostrated and paid due respect to God.

God replied, “I have come, ask for a boon.” The sadhu replied, “O God, my innermost wish was just to have darshan,

I don't want anything else. Your darshan was all I needed, I am redeemed. My eyes are content, my heart is full, and my mind is at peace, now I have no need of anything any more."

God said, "Look here, I have asked you what boon I can bestow upon you. Now that I have agreed to grant you a boon, you must ask for something." The sadhu said, "You are the indweller of all hearts, you know the secrets and desires that are hidden in the heart of every man, you know every thought and wish of everyone. Don't you know that I have no desire in my life, no wish that needs to be fulfilled? All I wanted was to see you, to have your darshan. I have received that now, I need nothing else."

God said, "I agree with everything you have said; everyone says I am omnipresent and omniscient, but time and time again I am called to earth by devotees to fulfil some wish they have. Therefore, it has become my habit to bestow boons to whomever I give darshan. I am compelled by this habit. Since I have uttered those words, 'Ask for a boon', I will have to give you something." The sadhu said, "God, you are mocking my devotion, you are ridiculing and making fun of it. You know only too well that apart from your darshan, I want nothing." Saying this, the sadhu bowed down before God and went his way.

God could not move, he just kept standing there and looking upon his devotee who had such a pure and simple heart, who had no desires, who wanted nothing for himself. As God wondered what he could do for this devotee, he by chance noticed the sadhu's shadow. Raising his hand in benediction, he bestowed a boon upon the shadow: "May you flower and flourish!"

The sadhu was unaware of this. He was in bliss at having received the darshan of his Lord and was lost in this divine memory. He kept going, oblivious of all else: his body, the countryside, the time, everything. However, the sadhu was being followed by his shadow. When the shadow fell upon a dead tree, it came to life, became green, full of leaves and

flowers. The shadow fell upon a blind man who regained his sight. The shadow fell upon a corpse, which sprang to life. The sadhu was totally oblivious of the miracles being performed by his shadow.

Whenever I am reminded of this story, the image of Swami Sivananda appears in my heart, as he was such a devotee: pure of heart, completely free from any negativity, not a trace of ego in his life. He would be like an adult in his interactions with adults, childlike with children, motherly with women. His life was free from ostentation and show. If a wrestler showed up, he would tuck in his dhoti and be ready for a bout. He would play with children and enthusiastically participate in their little games. If he saw an impoverished beggar, he would give that person whatever he had on him or in his hut. Any sick person he saw would be taken care of; all his medical treatment would be given free of cost with care and concern. Swami Sivananda's life was very simple, not a trace of pomposity or pride. He didn't care about being well turned out while receiving important visitors to make a good impression on them.

Swami Sivananda had only one thought, one idea in his mind: to serve others and, through sadhana and austerities, to purify himself. What do we do to soften a hard potato? We boil it in hot water. As we boil it, slowly, the hard potato loses its hardness and becomes soft. This is exactly what sadhana and austerities do. Your hearts and minds are hard, your body and senses are very hardened, but when you do sadhana and perform tapasya, like the potato, your personality also becomes softened.



Defeat the defeatist tendency

Swami Sivananda spent his time in seva, sadhana, satsang and swadhyaya. Anyone who came to him left with an inspiration that would guide them in their life.

The way he would inspire people is unique. There is the story of the past president of India, H.E. Dr Abdul Kalam. In the very opening pages of his autobiography, *On the Wings of Fire*, he describes his association and encounter with Swami Sivananda. In his youth, Dr Abdul Kalam wanted to become a fighter pilot and had joined the Air Force Academy. He was trained in an Air Force base in Dehradun near Rishikesh. He failed the final exam, however, and became depressed and dejected. From the Air Force Academy he came to Rishikesh. He sat down beside the river Ganga, and thought “What should I do now?”

While he was sitting and brooding in the early morning hours over his future, he heard footsteps coming down the steps of the ghat to the river. He turned around and there stood Swami Sivananda. He said, “My son, what are you doing here? What are you thinking?” Abdul Kalam said to him, “I am thinking about my future; I have failed my exam. I wanted to be a fighter pilot, but I have failed that exam. I am thinking what I should do next. I do not have any direction in life.” Swami Sivananda said to him, “Come after some time to the ashram and I will see you.”

Swami Sivananda took his bath in the river and walked back to the ashram. Around seven o'clock, Swami Sivananda would give satsang every day. Dr Abdul Kalam went to the satsang. Now, it was the nature of Swami Sivananda to pick a few people at random from the audience after satsang, call them over and speak to them. He met this young Abdul Kalam and said, “Listen, you have failed your test because destiny has something else in store for you. Therefore, do not feel dejected. Do not be defeated by the situations and circumstances. Instead, try to defeat the defeatist tendency in you. If you can defeat the defeatist tendencies in you, you will succeed.”

Many decades later, when Dr Abdul Kalam became the president of India, he came to Ganga Darshan to pay his respects to the memory of Swami Sivananda. There he told the story of his encounter and said, “That sentence which Swami Sivananda had told me, ‘Defeat the defeatist tendency within you’, is the mantra I have carried with me all my life. It has helped and inspired me, and I have become what I am today only because of that encounter with Swami Sivananda.” What a beautiful inspiration given by Swami Sivananda to a person experiencing dejection and depression and not knowing what to do. It motivated and inspired him into doing something so great that, one day, he became the president of the country! Such was the life of Swami Sivananda; he would give this inspiration to everybody.

Swami Sivananda’s eight steps of spiritual sadhana

Swami Sivananda’s spiritual teachings were very clear. He would say, “There are eight stages or steps in spiritual sadhana. You have to climb up these eight steps. When you reach the end of these eight steps, your sadhana will be complete.

What are these eight steps? First, purification; purify yourself, purify your thoughts, mind, emotions. Think the right things, do not think the negative things. Purification is the first step of spiritual sadhana. Then develop concentration; without concentration, nothing will happen. Concentration is the next step of spiritual sadhana. Develop the ability to reflect on things which you have done, your mistakes and achievements. Reflect on them and try to find your centre, your balance. Reflection is the third step to spiritual sadhana.

Meditation is the fourth step of sadhana. Illumination in meditation is the fifth step in sadhana. When you meditate and when the object of your meditation comes alive, that is the fifth step in sadhana. That is called illumination; the object of meditation is illuminated. For example, in a dark room, objects are there but you can’t see them in the



absence of light. If you shine a torch, the object at which you are shining the torch will be illuminated. In the same manner, your own spiritual nature is unknown to you; you don't know what your spiritual nature is. When you are able to focus your mind through concentration and meditation to attain a specific goal and result, then the object of meditation becomes illuminated and, in the course of time, identification takes place with the object of meditation. Sri Swamiji has explained this many times to us. Once identification takes place, you become absorbed in that experience. Once you are absorbed in that experience, salvation takes place. Purification, concentration, reflection, meditation, illumination, identification, absorption and salvation, these are the eight stages of spiritual sadhana.

Biggest hindrance in spiritual sadhana

The biggest hindrance in spiritual sadhana is the management of the ego. How do you know that you have ego in you? You don't, because you are the ego. If you say, "I don't have ego",

it is the ego making that statement. If you are proud and haughty, that is your ego manifesting. If you are stiff, that is your ego manifesting. You reflect your ego. You do not reflect your thoughts or aspirations; you reflect your ego. The way to manage this ego is through self-sacrifice, surrender and restraint. These are the three things that can help manage the ego. When a swimmer jumps into water, he will always swim with the flow of water. Regardless of his abilities and competence, if he swims against the current, try as he may, he will never make it to the other shore. This is surrender; know the current of your life and flow with it. Self-sacrifice is not giving up; it is an attitude where you live your life for others.

Just ask yourself a question: how much are you able to sacrifice? How much are you able to surrender and let go? How much are you able to restrain yourself in speech, thought and deed? The percentage will be very low. If you cultivate that continuously and constantly, you will find that ego expressions become less. The hard ego is destroyed, shattered, eliminating the biggest obstacle in sadhana. When one is not *sanyamit*, restrained, the ego is the most difficult block to overcome. That is the barrier which very few people can overcome. They can go so far, but there is that barrier which can only be overcome by restraint, surrender and sacrifice. These three are defined as ways to manage the ego.

Swami Sivananda says, "Selflessness, self-restraint and self-purification, self-analysis, introspection and self-examination will lead you to self-realization." He has given clear instructions. All his instructions form part of the advaita philosophy of a sannnyasin. Swami Sivananda was a vedantin who lived Vedanta, who did not propagate or speak on higher philosophy; rather, he lived it, through his simplicity and natural participation and involvement in life. He gave this samskara to each and every one of his disciples. Yoga became the medium to attain self-restraint, introspection, analysis and selflessness. At the same time, apart from the normal yoga practices, continuous effort must be made to remain aware of where you are slipping.

Swami Sivananda's ashtanga yoga

We all know and accept Sage Patanjali as one of the foremost propagators of yoga in the world. He took yoga up to a certain height, and said that through the eight limbs of ashtanga yoga: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, one can purify oneself, become steady, still and one with the object of devotion. He concluded his teachings at samadhi. This is an individual effort that one can make to transcend oneself.

After Sage Patanjali, Swami Sivananda takes the yogic teachings further. Swami Sivananda also spoke of ashtanga yoga. He said that after you arrive at the stage of samadhi, where your soul is purified and you begin to experience the inner Self, it then becomes your duty to distribute the gains you have received.

If someone attains samadhi and reaches God, God will ask just one thing, "For what reason have you come here?" The person will reply that they took samadhi in order to be close to God, to be in His proximity. God will say, "You are very selfish. You have taken samadhi for your own personal satisfaction and gain, to fulfil your own ambition. Now return and connect yourself with others." Thus, the ashtanga yoga that Swami Sivananda talks about is the eight stages of yoga after Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga.

What are the eight steps that Swami Sivananda speaks of? He says that after samadhi one has to again become active in life. The actions will now take the form of seva. Right now, you are working for yourself, but when you work for others then that work becomes seva. Therefore, serve. Love; learn to love everyone. Give; be generous, share what you have. Purify; once you serve, love and give, you will find yourself established in internal purity; you will achieve steadfast and permanent internal purity. Once you arrive at this stage of purity, you will become good. Once you become good, you will do good, and then you will arrive at a meditative state. When this meditative state is not just within you, but you experience it all around, you will have the darshan of

the Divine. So serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize. This is Swami Sivananda's ashtanga yoga. Sage Patanjali's yoga is for realizing the Self and Swami Sivananda's yoga is an expression of the realized Self.

We have great regard for Sage Patanjali in the field of yoga, and we have even greater regard for Swami Sivananda, as he has further illuminated the path of yoga. These are the two propagators of yoga who will be forever remembered by history. It is these teachings and qualities that were imbibed and realized by Swami Sivananda's disciples.

Teachings of Swami Satyananda

You can see Swami Sivananda's teachings reflected in the life of our own guru, Sri Swami Satyananda. The teachings of Sri Swamiji can be described in just two simple sentences. The entire teaching of yoga and spiritual life by our guru can be explained in two sentences only. Our guru, Sri Swamiji says, "Live in the world like a yogi and accept everything that the world gives you, like the master of your own life, like the master of the world":

*Yogi hokara jaga me jeenaa
Jagadeeshwara bana saba rasa peenaa.*

Live your life in the world as a yogi and receive everything that is given to you by the world, by the people, whether it is good or bad. Simply digest that as Shiva was able to digest poison.

How to be a yogi in the world? He has given us the method; he has shown us the path. He used yoga, sadhana and personal effort as the tools; he used hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, mantra yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga as tools, so we may come to transcend our limitations. Not the kind of yogi who lives in a Himalayan cave meditating for eight hours a day. No. A yogi is one who can practise restraint in the path of pleasure. All the teachings, sadhanas and techniques that we have received from our guru allow us to

receive a glimpse of our mind, emotions and soul, so we may recognize the layers of dirt that cover these and clean them. Once that is done, we will be able to see our inner self.

The system of yoga developed by Sri Swamiji allows one to live as a yogi in the world without renouncing the world. If you adopt the system of yoga he developed, and the knowledge of spiritual life which he taught in your life, it will allow you to become the master of your own life where you are able to receive everything and not be affected by anything. Receive everything that life throws at you as *prasad* from God. This is the basis for a balanced, disciplined and regulated life. This is also the teaching of *advaita* philosophy.

In the life of our guru, we see the same innocence, simplicity, determination and faith that we hear about when we speak of Swami Sivananda. Sri Swamiji lived the life of a *sannyasin*; he did not live the life of an ambitious *sannyasin*, he lived the life of a simple *sannyasin*. If he was ambitious, would he leave Ganga Darshan as a wandering mendicant at the pinnacle of his achievements? In this manner, Sri Swamiji did many things that exemplified how non-ambitious a *sannyasin* he truly was. Instead, *sankalpa* was always a part of his life. *Shraddha*, conviction, and *aastha*, faith, were always a part of Sri Swamiji's life, and he was one with his guru.

Eternal message of the parampara

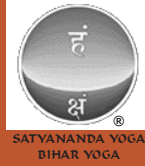
We are privileged to have taken birth at a time when masters like Sri Swamiji and Sri Swami Sivananda lived. It is a unique privilege that God has given us to have known them, to have received teachings from them. Where would we have been if we didn't have the opportunity to meet such masters that we only read about in books? Here we have lived with them, worked with them, played with them, and undertaken a journey with them. It is their inspiration and grace that guides us.

The essence of the teachings of our gurus is that through one lamp, you can light many others. Light the lamp of *bhakti*, *jnana* and *karma* in the life of everyone.



Love everyone and let love flow like the Ganga flows. That love has to be impersonal, unconditional. It is not with an expectation, but with an understanding that by loving them, you are loving the divinity inside them. Sri Swamiji has said this very clearly, “If God is in everyone then remember that when a person goes hungry, God within him is also hungry. When a person is thirsty, God within him is also thirsty. When a person is suffering, God within him is also suffering. When a person is happy, God within him is also happy. When a person is content, God within him is also content.” They are all reflections of that higher force. It is that realization which has to take place when we come to the fulfilment of our spiritual journey. These are the eternal teachings of our parampara, our tradition. This teaching of the parampara is not confined to Rikhia or Munger, but is global, as these ideals and thoughts apply to each and every one. Therefore, remember this simple sutra, “Light the flame of knowledge, light the flame of service, light the flame of devotion in the life of everyone and let love flow like the Ganga flows.”

Hari Om Tat Sat



“An institution is not an inheritance. Buildings and wealth are not the inheritance of a sadhu. A sadhu’s wealth and assets are the qualities he lives with lifelong. It is a disciple’s duty to strengthen the ideals that he upholds, lives and conducts himself with every day of his life. This is sannyasa. People think of sannyasa as renunciation, but sannyasa is connection; connection with oneself, one’s mind, spirit and creativity, with knowledge and dispassion, and with a philosophy which guides every step of life.”

The Yogadrishti (Yogavision) series of satsangs consists of discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati in Munger as part of the new phase of sannyasa life that he has embarked upon since 2009.

The theme of the satsangs Swamiji gave in July 2012, during Guru Poornima celebrations at Paduka Darshan Sannyasa Peeth, was the tradition of sannyasa that he has inherited and is passing on. Swamiji spoke on the origins and development of the sannyasa parampara, describing the lives, inspirations and teachings of eminent sages and gurus from ancient times, including Dattatreya, Adi Shankaracharya, Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, who were major forces in preserving, continuing and developing the spiritual current of India. Through describing these great personalities, Swamiji elucidated on the essence of the guru tattwa.



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